

Research Brief

Homework: Too much, too little?

Question: What is the value of homework and what does the current research say about it?

Summary of Findings:

In a Nutshell

What is homework? What value and benefit does it have for students? Some common perceptions from the students' perspective is that it is busy work, it takes away from other activities (i.e. sports, clubs, hanging out with friends, jobs, etc.), and/or it prevents them from getting as much sleep as they would like. From the teachers' perspective: it develops responsibility and good study habits, it helps the students prepare for what they will experience in college, and/or it takes precious time to design, assign and grade. The parents' responses range from: "I had to do it and it did not hurt me," "I was never good at _____ (fill in the blank) so I can not help my child," "It takes away from time with the family," "I have become a nag when it comes to my child getting homework done," and/or "My child has hours of homework daily and is not getting enough sleep."

The amount of homework given to students has varied over the past century, however, the amount of time spent on homework is up 51% since 1981 (*The myth about homework*). With the advent of No Child Left Behind, daily homework time has increased substantially. The NEA and NPTA recommend 10 minutes a night per grade level (*The myth about homework; Review of literature on homework*) and NASSP recommends 20-30 minutes daily per subject for the college bound students (*Homework*). Kohn recommends no homework except for very specific assignments that involve work that can only be done outside of school (*The homework myth*). According to research done by Cooper, 2001 (*Homework for all, Review of literature on homework; The myth about homework*) more than two hours of homework daily for high school students has a diminishing return on standardized tests.

Countries that outscore America on standardized tests such as Japan, Denmark and the Czech Republic assign less homework than do the U.S. schools. Conversely, countries that score low on standardized tests, such as Greece, Thailand and Iran, give a much higher amount of homework. Some research has found those who do homework tend to "...outperform students who do not do it by 69%" (*Review of literature on homework*). According to Marzano, a student can raise their GPA by a half point by doing an extra 30 minutes of homework daily. Rosenbaum found that students who did 15 or more hours of homework weekly gained almost 1.5 years of education and earned 16% more than the average worker, while those who did little to no homework had approximately 1.2 years less education and earned 19% lower than the average worker (*Review of literature on homework*).

The literature was consistent with the following suggestions and recommendations.

Homework should:

- have meaning, relevance and purpose and been explained to the students
- tie into and relate directly to the curriculum being studied
- be an extension of work and information from class
- provide practice and application of skills and information learned
- have consistent and reasonable expectations (i.e. due dates, time spent on it, how much should be completed, etc.)
- be assessed
- provide feedback as soon as possible to the student and teacher
- afford practice to reinforce new information
- prepare students for the upcoming content (i.e. reading, collecting materials, etc.)
- extend individual learning and apply to previous learnings
- be coordinated with other teachers so that the students are not overloaded with assignments

Homework should not:

- be a punishment
- be a reward (i.e. a student does not have to do it if ...)
- be optional
- be busy work
- lack relevance and purpose
- punish students who are from low SES due to lack of access (i.e. technology, support, etc.)

As a school, develop a policy to which everyone adheres.

- What are the beliefs and expectations about homework?
- What are the current practices? How do those practices relate to the beliefs and expectations?
- What forms of communication about homework are there with parents?
- When and often do teachers get together to discuss and coordinate homework assignments?
- What forms does homework take? What role does variety play in the assignments?
- What are the time expectations for assignments?
- How and what types of homework will be given to students who are on IEPs?
- Who will enforce the policy?
- When will the policy be reevaluated and modified?
- What programs of support will be available for students? (i.e. Hotline, peer tutoring, college students tutoring, before and after school access to teachers, etc.)

Resources:

- Countdown to principalship: A resource guide for beginning
A brief section about the administrator's learning about the school's homework policy is provided: Providing Instruction-p. 31.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=MXjT8wLYvcAC&pg=PA31&lpg=PA31&dq=%22homework+policies%22&source=web&ots=NSi8NJ63jn&sig=wAiFsgXKZoGNSwgmFJioM-UjMvQ#PPA31,M1>

- Developing a homework policy
A succinct article on information that should be included in a homework policy are given in this article.
<http://www.nwrel.org/request/oct00/develop.html>
- Developing homework policies
Although this article is from the early 1980s, it does describe the three different types of homework assignments most frequently given to students.
<http://library.adoption.com/parenting-skills/developing-homework-policies/article/4121/1.html>
- Getting the most out of homework
This piece is about 10 years old, however, it briefly describes the components necessary for homework to be a positive and productive experience.
<http://www.nwrel.org/request/oct00/most.html>
- Homework
A list of the pros and cons as well as considerations regarding homework are provided in this piece.
<http://www.sharingsuccess.org/code/bv/homework.pdf>
- Homework for all-in Moderation
This is an abstract about the importance of balancing the homework load of students.
<http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/wested/view/rs/203?x-t=wested.record.view>
- Homework and practice
A comprehensive piece on what needs to be in place in order for homework to be effective.
<http://www.netc.org/focus/strategies/home.php>
- Homework policies
A list of what needs to be included in order for homework to be successful is provided in this article.
<http://icee.isu.edu/Policy/RBHomework.pdf>
- Homework practices that support students with disabilities
Information regarding ways in which teachers can assign meaningful homework for students with disabilities is detailed in this piece.
http://www.peakparent.org/pdf/fact_sheets/homework.pdf
- Homework sucks: The case against homework
This is a book review on *The Case Against Homework*.
<http://www.boingboing.net/2007/05/27/homework-sucks-the-c.html>

- No more teachers, lots of books
This NY Times piece describes some of the problems with homework for students over summer vacation.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/19/opinion/19bennett.html?_r=2&n=Top%2fOpinion%2fEditorials%20and%20Op%2dEd%2fOp%2dEd%2fContributors&oref=slogin&oref=slogin
- Policies and practices affecting students
Different policies and practices affecting students are outlined in this article, including a section on homework.
<http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.chapter/menuitem.b71d101a2f7c208cdeb3ffdb62108a0c/?chapterMgmtId=2ad664597dcaff00VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD>
- Research Q & A: Homework
Active links to answer specific questions about different aspects of homework.
http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPIwE/b.2479421/k.5D02/Research_QA_Homework.htm
- Review of literature on homework
This article provides a succinct yet comprehensive review of current research and literature about homework.
http://www.westallegheny.k12.pa.us/hmwk_resrch.pdf
- Schools turn down heat on homework
A review about how and why different schools throughout the U.S. are assigning less homework than had been previously done is described in this piece.
<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07019/755198-28.stm>
- The case against homework
This is an interview with the authors of the book, *The Case Against Homework*.
<http://www.thecaseagainsthomework.com/more.php>
- The homework myth
This site goes to Amazon, where one can read excerpts from *The Homework Myth* by A. Kohn.
http://www.amazon.com/Homework-Myth-Alfie-Kohn/dp/0738210854/ref=si3_rdr_bb_product
- The great homework debate
A description of the problems and concerns about homework are given in this article.
<http://www.exploreli.com/entertainment/localguide/ny-b4894180sep17,0,891313,print.story?coll=ny-visit-left-navigation>
- The myth about homework
This Time magazine article reviews information from several experts (Cooper, Kohn, and Bennett & Kalish) about the concerns and issues surrounding homework.
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1376208,00.html>

- Theory into practice
This issue is dedicated to the issue of homework. The abstracts are available. In order to access full articles, one's library needs to be a subscriber to Project Muse.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_into_practice/toc/tip43.3.html
- What is homework?
A brief overview of what homework is and how parents can get involved with it are described in this article.
http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/HOW_IMPORTANT_HOMEWORK.html

School policies

- Bernalillo High School
<http://www.bernalillo.bps.k12.nm.us/education/components/docmgr/default.php?sectiondetailid=26&catfilter=235#showDoc>
- Goshen Central District
<http://www.gcsny.org/District/Publications/HomeworkGuidelines.pdf>
- Gunn High School
This is the homesite. For information on their specific policy the school would need to be contacted.
<http://gunn.pausd.org/home/web/index.php>
- Harvard-Westlake High School
This policy states that homework is given three hours per course weekly.
<http://www.hw.com/students/handbook/upper/life.asp#homework>
- Monona Grove School District
<http://www.mgsd.k12.wi.us/K-12%20HOMEWORK%20GUIDELINES.pdf>
- Warwick Academy
http://www.warwickacad.bm/studentInformation/homework_policies.htm

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